

(18)



Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets

(11) Publication number:

**0 161 512
B1**

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT SPECIFICATION

(45) Date of publication of patent specification: 19.07.89

(51) Int. Cl.⁴: H 04 N 17/00, H 04 H 9/00

(21) Application number: 85104566.6

(22) Date of filing: 16.04.85

(40) Divisional application 87118133 filed on 08.12.87.

(54) Program identification system.

(30) Priority: 26.04.84 US 604367

(43) Date of publication of application:
21.11.85 Bulletin 85/47

(45) Publication of the grant of the patent:
19.07.89 Bulletin 89/29

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH DE FR GB IT LI NL

(56) References cited:

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Courier Press, Leamington Spa, England.

Description

This invention relates generally to methods and apparatus for identifying programs and the viewing habits of the public, and more particularly to a system for identifying programs, such as television programs obtained from various sources, including video recorders.

Systems for identifying programs such as television programs that are broadcast or viewed are known. Such systems fall into various categories. These categories include manual systems wherein the viewer keeps a diary indicating all of the programs viewed; mechanical, electro-mechanical and electronic systems that sense the channel to which a television receiver is tuned; systems that detect identifying signals present in the television broadcast signal; and systems that monitor and analyze the program content of the broadcast signal utilizing image processing and correlation techniques to identify the program.

While all of these systems do provide a way to identify programs and to monitor the viewing habits of the public, the manual methods are slow in acquiring data and are prone to inaccuracies resulting from the entry of erroneous data that may be intentionally or unintentionally entered. Systems that monitor the channel to which a receiver is tuned overcome the drawbacks of the manual systems, but require access to the tuning mechanism of the receiver. Such access is becoming increasingly difficult with the advent of cable and pay television systems that utilize various converters and decoders, many of which are difficult to access. Moreover, such systems cannot identify programs played from a source such as a home video recorder. Systems that detect identification signals encoded on the broadcast signal overcome many of the accuracy and access disadvantages described above, but require the cooperation of the broadcasters who must encode the programs prior to broadcast for such systems to be effective. Consequently, such systems are useable only on a limited number of broadcasts, such as network broadcasts. Systems that monitor and analyze the content of the program itself theoretically eliminate the disadvantages of the other systems, but heretofore the information processing requirements of such systems rendered such systems impractical or uneconomical because of the computing capacity required to analyze the vast quantity of information present in a broadcast signals. Moreover, previous attempts to reduce the quantity of information processed tended to introduce inaccuracies.

An example of a system that utilizes the program content of a broadcast signal to identify the program is described in United States Patent No. US—A—3,919,479 to Moon et al. The Moon et al. system utilizes a non-linear analog transform to produce a low frequency envelope waveform, and the information in the low frequency envelope of a predetermined time interval is digitized to generate a signature. The signatures

thus generated are compared with reference signatures to identify the program. However, the Moon et al. system generates the signatures continuously, and consequently, requires a large computer to process the data thus generated.

Another system that monitors the program content of a broadcast signal is disclosed in United States Patent No. US—A—4,230,990 to Lert Jr. et al. The system disclosed in the Lert Jr. et al patent reduces the amount of data that must be processed, as compared to the data amount as processed by the Moon et al. patent, by utilizing cues that are either externally generated or present in the program material to initiate the signature generation and correlation process only after a cue has been detected. However, the system disclosed in the Lert Jr. et al. patent is designed to monitor the programs broadcast by broadcasting stations such as network affiliated stations in order to determine whether they are broadcasting the programs required by the networks to be broadcast, rather than as a system for determining the viewing habits of the public. Thus, many of the problems that occur when the habits of a television viewer are being monitored, such as, for example, frequent channel changing, and the problems that occur in identifying programs that are recorded and subsequently played back by a home video recorder are not addressed.

The invention as claimed solves the problem of identifying programs broadcast and the viewing habits of television viewers regardless of the source of the program material, whether it be off the air, cable or prerecorded material, utilizing data reduction and correlation techniques to minimize the amount of computation required to identify the program material. This is accomplished by extracting signatures from the program material only upon the occurrence of certain predetermined events, whether the events occur in the program material, for example a blank frame or a scene change, or are the result of an action taken by the viewer, for example the on/off condition of the television set and the mode of operation of the video recorder. In addition to providing a trigger for the extraction of the signature from the program material, the predetermined sequence of events may serve to indicate whether a program is being recorded or a pre-recorded program is being viewed.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, there is provided a system having a home unit that monitors the viewing conditions in the home, for example, whether the television set is on or off, whether any home video recorder (e.g., a video cassette recorder or VCR) is on or off and the video signal being received. By monitoring the aforementioned signals and functions, the system determines whether no viewing is occurring, whether a television broadcast is being viewed, whether a television broadcast is being recorded, whether viewing and recording is occurring simultaneously, or whether a previously recorded program is being viewed. Once the viewing mode has been established, the

program being viewed is identified by extracting a characteristic signature from the video signal and storing it for subsequent comparison with reference signatures stored in a central office.

Once the mode of viewing has been determined, a signature of the program material being viewed or recorded is extracted, provided certain predetermined events occur first. These events shall be referred to as Event 1 and Event 2. Several events can serve as Event 1. These events may be a turn on of the television set, a channel change, a predetermined time interval, for example 5 to 10 minutes, since the occurrence of the previous Event 1, or a sudden change to a black scene. Events that can serve as an Event 2 include a scene change to a scene other than a black scene, a color change, which may be an overall color change or a color change of a predetermined line, a still picture as evidenced by several consecutive substantially identical frames, an audio level change, and others.

Upon the occurrence of an Event 1, the home unit monitors the broadcast for the occurrence of an Event 2, and extracts a pair of signatures from the video signal immediately following the next two Event 2s following an Event 1. Or, if a previously recorded program is being viewed, the system extracts three or more signatures from the video signal immediately following the next three or more Event 2s following an Event 1. The signatures are extracted by detecting and digitizing the envelope of the video signal immediately following the Event 2s. The digitized signatures, as well as the times that the signatures were extracted, are stored for future comparison with reference signals stored in a central location. The time intervals between Event 2s are also stored and used to identify the program either by themselves or in conjunction with extracted signatures. The time intervals between Event 2s are particularly useful for identifying the playback of previously recorded video tapes for reasons that will be discussed in a subsequent portion of the specification.

The unit used to acquire the reference signatures that are compared with the signatures received from the home units is similar to the home unit except that the reference signature acquisition unit monitors each broadcast continuously, and does not require an Event 1 to initiate a signature extraction. Therefore, each broadcast is continuously monitored and a signature is extracted each time an Event 2 is detected. The signatures, as well as the times of occurrence of the signatures are stored to form a library of reference signatures. The stored signatures are compared with signatures obtained from the home unit that occurred at approximately the same time. The time intervals between Event 2s are also stored for comparison with corresponding time intervals received from the home units.

A mode of implementation and the major advantages of the present invention will become readily apparent upon consideration of the

following detailed description and attached drawing wherein:

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a home unit of the program identification system according to the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a central office and reference signature extraction portions of the system according to the invention;

FIG. 3 is a chart illustrating the various modes of viewing and recording that can occur in a typical household;

FIGS. 4 and 5 are flow charts illustrating the logical steps performed by the home and central office units, respectively;

FIG. 6 is a flow chart illustrating the logical steps performed by the central office unit in identifying signatures; and

FIG. 7 illustrates how signatures and scene changes may be extracted from the video envelope.

Referring now to the drawing, with particular attention to FIG. 1, there is illustrated a block diagram of the home unit of the system according to the invention generally designated by the reference numeral 10. The system 10 receives signals to be identified from a television receiver 12, and in many instances from a home video recorder, such as a video cassette recorder or a VCR 14. In a typical home installation, the receiver 12 and the VCR 14 receive signal from a receiving antenna 16, and in many instances from a cable television system 18. These signals may be applied directly to the receiver 12 and to the VCR 14, but it is convenient to employ a switching network 20 that selectively switches the receiver 12 and VCR 14 to the antenna 16 and to the cable 18 in order to permit the viewing and recording of broadcasts received from the antenna 16 or from the cable 18. In addition, the switching network 20 may connect the VCR 14 to the receiver 12 to permit prerecorded or previously recorded tapes to be played back by the VCR and viewed by the receiver 12.

Video signals representative of the program applied to the receiver 12, as well as video signals representative of the signals being recorded by the VCR 14, are applied to a video processing circuit 22, for example, by a video switching circuit 24 which permits either the receiver 12 or the VCR 14, or both, to be monitored. The video processing circuit 22 includes a detector and a low pass filter (discussed subsequently in greater detail), and provides a signal representative of the envelope of the video signal to an analog-to-digital converter 25 which generates a digital representation of the video envelope. The digitized video envelope signal is applied to an events detector 26 which detects predetermined events that occur in the digitized video signal, and causes the signature of the digitized video signal to be extracted by signature extraction circuitry 28 upon the occurrence of a predetermined sequence of events. The signature thus generated is stored in a data storage system 30 along with the time that the signature was extracted. The

extraction times are provided by a clock 32 which provides a digital representation of time to the data storage system 30 via, for example, a combining circuit 34. The clock 32 may be a real time clock or a relative time clock that is periodically reset from a central location. The function of the events detector 26, the signature extractor circuitry 28, the data storage 30 and the clock 32 can be performed by individual circuits as shown or by a microprocessor based system.

The home unit 10 is interrogated at periodic intervals, for example, once a day, by a central office unit, generally designated by the reference numeral 40 (FIG. 2), which compares the signatures from the various home units with reference signatures in order to identify the signatures from the home unit. The home units may be periodically interrogated by a data communications circuit 42 that accesses the various home units via a suitable communications system, for example, a plurality of telephone lines 44. The signatures thus collected are compared by a central computer system 48 with signatures stored in a data base 46. Central computer system 48 controls the collection and classification of the signatures received from the home unit as well as the generation of reference signatures to be stored in the data base 46. The latter function is performed in conjunction with a plurality of reference signal extraction circuits 50 that are located in the cities being monitored. The reference signature extraction circuits monitor the various networks, cables and other signal sources in those cities, and extract reference signals, for example, whenever an Event 2 occurs in any of the signals being monitored. The reference signals thus extracted are transmitted to the central office unit 40 and stored in the data base 46 along with the times that such signatures are extracted, as provided by a clock 52. The clock 52 of FIG. 2 is similar to the clock 32 of the home unit and serves to indicate the time of occurrence of the reference signatures. The clock 52 may also be a real time clock or a relative time clock that is periodically set by the central office 40. A central reference signature extraction circuit 54 and associated clock 56 serve to extract signatures and times of extraction of cable originated programs and signatures of prerecorded programs. Alternatively, extraction circuits may be placed at the head ends of cable system to extract reference signatures of cable programs. The signature extraction performed by the various extraction circuits and data storage is controlled by the central computer system 48.

The home unit of the system according to the invention monitors the mode of viewing by monitoring the on and off and other functions of the television receiver and any video recorder that may be used in the home. The various modes of viewing or recording are illustrated in FIG. 3. Mode 1 occurs when both the VCR and television receiver are both off, and indicates that no viewing is taking place. Mode 2 represents television viewing and occurs when the television receiver

is on and the VCR is off. Mode 3 represents recording by the home VCR and occurs when the television receiver is off and the VCR is on. Mode 4 occurs when the VCR and the television receiver are both on, and can represent one of three conditions. The first condition, designated as mode 4.0, represents television viewing through the tuner of the VCR without recording. Mode 4.1 represents VCR recording and television viewing, while the third condition, designated as Mode 4.2, represents VCR playback. Other modes of operation of the VCR, such as fast forward and rewind, are designated as Modes 4.3 and 4.4, respectively. Most of these modes can be easily detected by monitoring power line voltage or voltages elsewhere in the television set and the video recorder. Modes 4.0, 4.3 and 4.4 can be detected by logic circuitry.

As previously stated, the home unit 10 monitors the viewing mode and the video signal, and extracts signatures from the video signal only if certain events occur. The logic necessary to provide this function is illustrated in FIG. 4. As is apparent from FIG. 4, the mode of operation is recorded whenever there is a change in the mode, such as, for example, a change from viewing to recording, etc. Each time the mode changes, a determination is made in order to determine what the new mode is. This is accomplished by determining whether the television is on or off, whether the VCR is on or off, and whether the VCR is in a record or playback mode. Once it has been determined whether the television and VCR are on or off, and whether the VCR is in a record or playback mode, the mode can readily be determined by using a look-up table containing the information in FIG. 3, and the mode is recorded.

If the mode is determined to be Mode 1, indicating no viewing, no further action is taken until the mode changes again. If it is determined that the mode of operation is either Mode 2 or Mode 4, the system monitors the television receiver for the occurrence of an Event 1, which may, for example, be any one of the following:

1. television turn-on
2. a channel change
3. a predetermined time interval (e.g 5—10 minutes) since the previous Event 1
4. a sudden scene change to a black scene
5. loss of synchronization for an appreciable period of time.

Such Event 1s are relatively easy to detect. For example, television turn-on can be detected simply by monitoring an appropriate voltage or current. Television turn-on is not used as an Event 1 in the system illustrated in FIG. 4 but may be used in other systems, particularly systems that do not monitor a VCR and consequently need not employ mode logic. A channel change can be detected by monitoring the position of the tuner mechanism when mechanical tuners are used, by monitoring tuning voltage in electrically tuned tuners, by monitoring local oscillator frequency, or even more simply by monitoring the video synchronization pulses, preferably the vertical

synchronization pulses and indicating a channel change in the event of a loss or a change in the synchronization pulse for a short time interval. The predetermined time interval can readily be determined from a clock, and a sudden scene change to black can be readily detected by monitoring the average value of the video signal and indicating a change to a black scene when the average value becomes that representative of an all black scene. A loss of synchronization for an appreciable length of time (longer than that caused by a channel change) indicates fast forward or rewind mode of operation of a VCR (Mode 4.3 or 4.4) or the loss of the video signal (e.g. station off the air).

As long as no Event 1 occurs, the home unit records no new data; however, upon the occurrence of an Event 1, the system is conditioned to extract a signature upon the occurrence of the next two consecutive Event 2s, with an Event 2 being defined as:

1. a scene change to a scene other than a black scene
2. a color change in successive frames or portions thereof
3. a still picture
4. an audio level change.

Ways of detecting the various Event 2s described above, as well as ways for extracting signatures will be discussed in a subsequent portion of the specification.

Upon the occurrence of an Event 1, a counter is set to zero and the video signal is monitored to determine if the television synchronization or sync signal is stable. This is accomplished, for example, by monitoring the vertical synchronization pulses and waiting until a predetermined number, for example, 16, consecutive stable vertical sync pulses are detected before the unit is permitted to detect an Event 2. If the synchronization has not been stable for a significant period of time, more than five seconds, this period will be marked either as television station is off the air or VCR fast forward or rewind.

Once the sync has been stable for the required number of pulses, the system monitors the video signal for the occurrence of an Event 2. Whenever such an Event 2 change is detected, the time of the occurrence of the Event 2 is recorded as is the time interval since the previous Event 2, if the time intervals between Event 2s are to be used as a means of program identification. The signature of the first frame following the last detected Event 2 change is then extracted. Since a standard broadcast television frame consists of two interlaced fields, and since the two fields that form a frame are quite similar, it is not necessary to analyze both fields of the frame to obtain a signature. Typically, a satisfactory signature is obtained from only a single field, for example, the first field of a frame. The method of extracting the signature will be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent portion of the detailed description, as will the method of detecting an Event 2.

Once the signature has been extracted, the

counter is incremented by 1. If the count in the counter is less than two, indicating that more signatures are needed, the system is conditioned to respond to another Event 2 to extract and record another signature. If the count in the counter is two (or the required number of signatures) or greater, indicating that the signatures required have been extracted, the system is conditioned to require an Event 1 to occur before it responds to any further Event 2s.

If it is determined that the mode of operation is Mode 3, that is, VCR recording, it is not necessary for an Event 1 to occur before the signal is monitored for Event 2s. The only determination that is made is whether the synchronization is stable, and if so, the system looks for Event 2s continuously and extracts the signature and records the time of occurrence of the signature each time an Event 2 is detected. Thus, all signatures following every Event 2 are extracted and stored so that upon subsequent playback, the program may be identified even though only portions of the tape may be played back.

The logic for extracting reference signatures is illustrated in FIG. 5. Each broadcast and cable channel is monitored continuously by the reference signature extraction circuits 50 and 54, and a signature is extracted each time an Event 2 occurs to provide a reference library of reference signals. Consequently, since it is desired to extract a signature that occurs after every Event 2, Event 1s are not monitored. All that is required is that the sync be stable and that an Event 2 occur. Thus, whenever an Event 2 occurs, the time of occurrence of the Event 2 as well as the signature of the scene following the scene change is recorded for future comparison with signatures received from the various home units. The time intervals between Event 2s may be recorded or obtained from the times of occurrence of the Event 2s.

The logic employed by the central computer system 48 of the central unit 40 in order to identify a program is illustrated in FIG. 6. As is illustrated in FIG. 6, two consecutive signatures from a home unit are selected. If there is not enough data to define two consecutive signatures, the next home unit is monitored. After two consecutive signatures are selected, a check is made to determine whether the signatures really are a pair, for example, that there is no Event 1 between the two signatures.

If the two signatures are a pair, the time associated with the first home unit signature is read. All reference unit signatures in the data base 46 that occurred within a predetermined time interval of the occurrence of the first home unit signature, for example, plus or minus eight seconds, are selected for comparison, and the correlation coefficient between the first home unit signature and the selected reference unit signatures are computed. If one of the correlation coefficient exceeds a predetermined threshold, the time associated with the second home unit signature is read. The next several, for example,

six, reference unit signatures that occur, for example, within a predetermined time interval, for example, plus or minus eight seconds of the time associated with the second home unit signature are selected, and the correlation coefficients between the second home unit signature and the reference unit signatures are computed. If one of the correlations coefficient exceeds the predetermined threshold, an identification is made and stored, and printed out, if necessary.

As discussed above, the system according to the invention utilizes a time reference to access reference signatures that occurred at approximately the same time as the home unit signature being evaluated in order to eliminate the need for comparing the home unit signature with all of the reference signatures in the data base 46. However, when a previously recorded program is being played back, the time that the signature occurs during playback cannot be used to locate the reference signal. Thus, in accordance with another important aspect of the present invention, the times of occurrence of signatures that occur when programs are being recorded are also stored. The times of occurrence of signatures that occur in Mode 3 (recording) are kept in a separate recording time file in the data base 46. Similarly, in Mode 4.1 (viewing and recording) the times of signatures are also kept in the recording time file. Thus, when the broadcast is played back (Mode 4.2), even though the recorded signatures cannot be matched to signatures stored in the reference unit during playback, the signature can still be identified by utilizing the recording time instead of the playback time to retrieve the corresponding reference signatures from the reference signature data base 46. Thus, by keeping signatures relating to programs that were broadcast several days or weeks ago within the data base 46, such previously recorded and subsequently played back broadcasts can be readily identified.

Alternatively, in order to identify the playback of previously recorded programs, instead of comparing the obtained during playback with reference the signatures that represent the programs broadcast several days or weeks ago stored in the recording time file of the reference signature data base 46 (FIG. 2) of the central office unit, the played back signatures may be compared with signatures obtained by the home unit previously during VCR recording (Mode 3) and stored in the data storage 30 (FIG. 1) of the home unit. If desired, the signatures may also be sent to the central office, as are the signatures obtained during normal television viewing, but these signatures would be labeled as VCR recording, and may be stored in the recording time file. However, when playback occurs, the played back signatures would be compared with the signatures stored in the home unit data storage. Only if a match occurred, would the signatures be sent to the central office and compared with the signatures stored in the central office data base 46 to identify the program. If no match occurred, the signatures would be sent. This is because whatever is being

played back cannot be identified, and may be something like, for example, a home movie. Thus, the system eliminates the need to search the entire recording file of the data base 46 in an attempt to identify something that cannot be identified.

In the playback mode, when attempting to match the signatures obtained during playback with the signatures stored in the data storage 30, it is convenient to use the time intervals between the occurrence of the signatures (or Event 2s) to generate a time interval signature, TIS, (discussed in greater detail in a subsequent portion of the specification) to obtain the match. When using a time interval signature for matching, three or more consecutive signatures are extracted, and the time intervals between the signatures are compared with the time intervals between signatures stored in the data storage 30. When a corresponding pair of consecutive time intervals is found, a match is indicated. If greater accuracy is desired, more than three consecutive signatures may be extracted to provide more than two consecutive time intervals.

Event 2s may be detected in a variety of ways. For example, the video signal may be low pass filtered, for example, through a low pass filter having a cut-off frequency on the order of approximately 2 to 6 kilohertz, and its average amplitude detected. The signal may be digitized by assigning a number representative of the average amplitude of the video signal for each frame. The numbers thus obtained may be compared in various ways. For example, the numbers obtained from different frames may be compared, and if the numbers are substantially different, a scene change will be indicated. The numbers compared may be obtained from consecutive frames or from non-consecutive frames, for example, frames spaced by a 20 to 40 frame interval, depending on the type of event that has been defined as the Event 2. Alternatively, a moving average of the numbers representative of the video amplitudes of the last several frames may be calculated, and the number representative of the average amplitude of the last detected frame compared with the moving average to indicate a scene change if the number associated with the last frame substantially differs from the moving average.

The various comparing schemes are useful for identifying various different types of Event 2s. For example, comparing the number associated with a particular frame with the number associated with a previous frame is useful for detecting an Event 2 that may be termed an instant scene change. A moving average comparison or a comparison with frames that occurred several frames ago is useful for detecting an Event 2 that may be termed a fade type scene change wherein one scene is gradually faded in and the previous scene is gradually faded out. Because in a fade type scene change, the change occurs gradually, there is no drastic change in the number associated with consecutive frames, and con-

sequently, such a scene change cannot readily be detected by a system that compares immediately successive frames. Numbers that are substantially identical for several consecutive frames may be used to indicate a still picture.

Other methods of detecting an Event 2 include detecting a color change, for example, by detecting the average amplitude of a particular color component, such as, for example, a red component, of each frame or a particular line or lines of each frame, and making comparisons of the types described above. Alternatively, different color components or an average of the three color signals can be monitored for each frame and comparisons made. In addition, rather than monitoring an entire frame, only portions of a frame may be monitored. These portions may be selected to be those portions of a frame that normally do not change unless a scene change occurs. Such portions may occur near the top or bottom of the screen because such areas are less likely to be affected by action or movement occurring within a scene. The Event 2s may be detected electronically by monitoring the video envelope, or by monitoring the cathode ray tube, for example, by placing a light sensitive photoelectric device 36 (FIG. 1) in proximity with the cathode ray tube, preferably in one corner thereof. Alternatively, the audio signal may be monitored by an audio processing circuit 38 and applied to the analog-to-digital converter 25 to generate an Event 2 when the audio signal departs from a predetermined level.

In accordance with an alternative embodiment of the present invention that is particularly suitable for identifying prerecorded programs, the time intervals between events, or in changes in one or more predetermined parameters, can be used to define a feature string. Such a system can be used either alone, or in combination with a signature extracting system to identify the program. When used alone, the amount of data generated by the system is less than that generated by a signature generating system, and therefore, does not require much computation time to obtain a correlation. Consequently, it is not necessary to store the time of occurrence of each change (unless it is desired for other reasons), but rather, only the elapsed time between such changes need be stored. Such a system is particularly useful in identifying the playback of prerecorded programs, or delayed broadcast programs because real time data is not necessary to make the identification.

In a system wherein the intervals between predetermined changes in predetermined events are used to generate a time interval signature (TIS). The time interval signature, which can be represented as a digital code sequence, can be constructed by measuring the time intervals between the sequential occurrences of regularly occurring events in a broadcast. Preferably, the chosen events should have the following properties:

1. Be readily measurable automatically.

2. Occur at a sufficiently high rate that enough intervals are available to allow unique identification of the signal.

3. Always be present.

4. Cannot be controlled by program originators to render identification vulnerable to changes in programming methods.

Typical events that can be used as the events to generate a time interval string includes scene changes to black, Event 2s, including shifts in the average amplitude of the video signal, departures in the amplitude of the instantaneous video signal from the average, shifts in the video color balance, changes in the average color of a predetermined line, for example, a line near the top of the screen, a predetermined audio power level, for example, silence, etc. Thus, to define a time interval string, the home unit would generate a time interval string (TIS) by detecting one of the predetermined events, for example, an Event 2 such as a scene change, and store the time intervals between consecutive changes.

The monitoring of events can be done continuously to generate a long TIS without requiring an excessive memory capacity because such changes occur relatively infrequently, and the time intervals therebetween can be defined by only a few bits. The TIS's thus obtained from the home unit are compared with reference TIS's stored in the central unit.

However, in order further to reduce the amount of data that must be stored, the time intervals between the events being monitored may be monitored only after the occurrence of another predetermined event, such as an Event 1; and it has been found that satisfactory identification can be obtained by generating a feature string consisting of three time intervals between changes in the monitored variable, such as a scene change or other Event 2. The time interval strings thus generated are matched with reference time interval strings that are obtained in much the same way as those generated by the home units except that the reference time interval strings are continuously generated for each broadcast or other program source being monitored.

Referring now to Fig. 7, there is shown a video envelope 100 as provided from the video processing circuit 22 (Fig. 1) to the analog-to-digital converter 25. The analog-to-digital converter 25 takes a plurality of samples 102 (Fig. 7) for example, 80 samples during a single frame interval, and generates a digital value representative of the amplitude of each of the samples 102. The digital values thus generated are applied to the events detector 26 (Fig. 1) and to the signature extraction circuit 28 and used to detect the various events and to extract signatures.

In order to detect an Event 2, for example, a scene change, the events detector 26 compares each of the digitized samples 102 of a current frame with a corresponding digitized sample 102 of a previous frame, either the immediately preceding frame or another previous frame, depending on the type of scene change to be detected.

The counterpart samples are then compared to determine whether a scene change has occurred. More specifically, the detection of a scene change occurs as follows:

1. Take, for example, 80 samples of the video envelope of each frame
2. Compare counterpart samples of a current frame and a previous frame
3. Take the absolute value of the difference of each of the counterpart samples
4. Take the average of the absolute values
5. Indicate a scene change if the average of the absolute values exceeds a predetermined threshold.

The indication of a scene change is applied to the signature extraction circuit 28 (Fig. 1) to cause the signature extraction circuit 28 to operate on the digitized samples 102 to extract the signature.

The signature extraction circuit 28 operates on the digitized samples 102 by taking the average value of consecutive samples 102, for example, eight consecutive samples to generate a total of, for example, ten features 104 that comprise an image signature. Typically, four bits define a feature, and consequently, an image signature can be defined by forty bits of data for the example discussed above; however, in some instances more features and more data may be required.

Both the home unit 10 (Fig. 1) and the reference signature extraction circuits 50 and 54 (Fig. 2) operate in the same manner to extract signatures, the only difference in operation being that the signature extraction circuit 28 (Fig. 1) requires an Event 2 to be preceded by an Event 1 before signature extraction occurs; but the reference signature extraction circuits 50 and 54 (Fig. 2) do not require an Event 1 to precede an Event 2, but rather extract a reference signature each time an Event 2 occurs.

Once the home unit signatures and the reference signatures are obtained, the home unit signatures will be compared with the reference unit signatures, normally with those signatures occurring in corresponding time intervals. The correlation coefficients between the home unit signatures and the reference unit signatures will be compared, and the reference signature that has the best correlation to the home unit signature will be used to identify the program being viewed, provided that the correlation coefficient exceeds a minimum threshold. If it does not, no match will be indicated.

Claims

1. A system for recording information relating to television subscribers' viewing habits by identifying viewed programme material selected from a plurality of available viewing modes, each mode being associated with the status of the television receiver and its associated video recorder, in which system viewed programmes are identified by extracting predetermined characteristics from the viewed programme material and recording

for analysis the said predetermined characteristics, characterized by means (26) for detecting a first predetermined event (Event 1) relating to the selected viewing mode, means (26) for detecting a second predetermined event (Event 2) in the viewed programme material, and means (28) for extracting at least one predetermined characteristic of the viewed programme material after the occurrence of a predetermined number of said first and second events.

2. The system recited in claim 1 wherein said program material is that of a television video signal and said second event detecting means (26) includes means for detecting a scene change from one video scene to another video scene.

3. The system recited in claim 2 wherein said television signal is received by a television signal receiver (12), and wherein said first event detecting means (26) includes means for detecting the turn-on of the television signal receiver.

4. The system recited in claim 2 wherein said television signal is received by a television signal receiver (12), and wherein said first event detecting means (26) includes means for detecting a change in the channel to which the television signal receiver is tuned.

5. The system recited in claim 1 wherein said program material is that of a television video signal and said first event detecting means (26) includes means for detecting a change from a video scene to a black scene.

6. The system recited in claim 1 wherein said first event detecting means (26) includes means for detecting the elapse of a predetermined length of time after the occurrence of the previous first event (Event 1).

7. The system recited in claim 6 wherein said first event detecting means (26) includes means for setting the predetermined length of time to approximately 5 to 10 minutes.

8. The system recited in claim 1 wherein said extracting means (28) includes means for extracting said predetermined characteristic upon the third occurrence of the second event (Event 2) following the occurrence of the first event (Event 1), and wherein the predetermined characteristic is the time interval between the second event and the immediately preceding second event that was not followed by a first event.

Patentansprüche

1. System zum Aufzeichnen von Informationen in bezug auf die Zuschauergewohnheiten von Fernsehteilnehmern durch Identifizierung betrachteten Programmmaterials aus einer Mehrzahl verfügbarer Betrachtungsmoden, wobei ein jeder Modus mit dem Zustand des Fernsehempfängers und seines zugehörigen Videorecorders zusammenhängt und betrachtete Programme in dem System durch Extrahieren vorbestimmter Charakteristika aus dem betrachteten Programmmaterial und Aufzeichnen der vorbestimmten Charakteristika zu einer Analyse identifiziert werden, gekennzeichnet durch Mittel (26) zur Ermittlung

eines ersten vorbestimmten Ereignisses (Ereignis 1), das sich auf den gewählten Betrachtungsmodus bezieht, Mittel (26) zur Ermittlung eines zweiten vorbestimmten Ereignisses (Ereignis 2) in dem betrachteten Programmaterial und Mittel (28) zum Extrahieren von mindestens einem vorbestimmten Charakteristikum des betrachteten Programmaterials nach dem Auftreten einer vorbestimmten Anzahl der genannten ersten und zweiten Ereignisse.

2. System nach Anspruch 1, worin das Programmaterial dasjenige eines Fernseh-Videosignals ist und die Mittel (26) zur Ermittlung des zweiten Ereignisses Mittel zur Ermittlung eines Szenenwechsels von einer Videoszene zu einer anderen enthalten.

3. System nach Anspruch 2, worin das Fernsehsignal von einem Fernsehsignalempfänger (12) empfangen wird und die Mittel (26) zur Ermittlung des ersten Ereignisses Mittel zur Ermittlung des Einschaltens des Fernsehsignalempfängers enthalten.

4. System nach Anspruch 2, worin das Fernsehsignal von einem Fernsehsignalempfänger (12) empfangen wird und die Mittel (26) zur Ermittlung des ersten Ereignisses Mittel zur Ermittlung eines Wechsels in dem Kanal enthalten, auf den der Fernsehsignalempfänger eingestellt ist.

5. System nach Anspruch 1, worin das Programmaterial dasjenige eines Fernseh-Videosignals ist und die Mittel (26) zur Ermittlung des ersten Ereignisses Mittel enthalten für die Feststellung eines Wechsels von einer Videoszene zu einer schwarzen Szene.

6. System nach Anspruch 1, worin die Mittel (26) zur Ermittlung des ersten Ereignisses Mittel enthalten für die Feststellung des Ablaufs einer vorbestimmten Zeit seit Auftreten eines vorausgehenden ersten Ereignisses (Ereignis 1).

7. System nach Anspruch 6, worin die Mittel (26) zur Ermittlung des ersten Ereignisses Mittel enthalten zur Festsetzung der vorbestimmten Zeit auf etwa 5 bis 10 Minuten.

8. System nach Anspruch 1, worin die Extraktionsmittel (28) Mittel enthalten zum Extrahieren des vorbestimmten Charakteristikums nach dem dritten Auftreten des zweiten Ereignisses (Ereignis 2) im Anschluß an das Auftreten des ersten Ereignisses (Ereignis 1) und worin das vorbestimmte Charakteristikum das Zeitintervall zwischen dem zweiten Ereignis und dem unmittelbar vorausgehenden zweiten Ereignis, nach dem kein erstes Ereignis auftrat, ist.

Revendications

1. Système pour l'enregistrement d'informations relatives aux habitudes de vision des abonnés à la télévision en identifiant le contenu d'un programme visionné sélectionné à partir d'une pluralité de modes de vision disponibles, chaque mode étant associé au statut du récepteur de télévision et de l'enregistreur vidéo qui lui est

associé, les programmes visionnés dans ledit système étant identifiés en extrayant des caractéristiques prédéterminées du contenu du programme visionné et en enregistrant, en vue de leur analyse, lesdites caractéristiques prédéterminées, caractérisé par des moyens (26) pour détecter un premier événement prédéterminé (Événement 1) relatif au mode de vision sélectionné, des moyens (26) pour détecter un second événement prédéterminé (Événement 2) dans le contenu du programme visionné, et des moyens (28) pour extraire au moins une caractéristique prédéterminée du contenu du programme visionné après que se soient produits un nombre prédéterminé desdits premier et second événements.

2. Système suivant la revendication 1, dans lequel ledit contenu du programme est celui d'un signal vidéo de télévision et ledit moyen de détection dudit second événement (26) comporte des moyens pour détecter un changement de scène d'une scène vidéo à une autre.

3. Système suivant la revendication 2, dans lequel ledit signal de télévision est reçu par un récepteur de signal de télévision (12) et où le moyen de détection (26) dudit premier événement comporte un moyen pour détecter la mise en service du récepteur de signal de télévision.

4. Système suivant la revendication 2, dans lequel ledit signal de télévision est reçu par un récepteur de signal de télévision (12) et où le moyen de détection (26) dudit premier événement comporte un moyen pour détecter un changement du canal sur lequel est accordé le récepteur du signal de télévision.

5. Système suivant la revendication 1, dans lequel ledit contenu du programme est celui d'un signal vidéo de télévision et le moyen de détection (26) dudit premier événement comporte un moyen pour détecter un passage d'une scène vidéo à une scène noire.

6. Système suivant la revendication 1, dans lequel le moyen de détection (26) dudit premier événement comporte un moyen pour détecter la durée d'un temps prédéterminé après que se soit produit le premier événement précédent (Événement 1).

7. Système suivant la revendication 6, dans lequel le moyen de détection (26) dudit premier événement comporte un moyen pour fixer la durée de temps prédéterminée à environ 5 à 10 minutes.

8. Système suivant la revendication 1, dans lequel ledit moyen d'extraction (28) comporte un moyen pour extraire ladite caractéristique prédéterminée lorsque se produit pour la troisième fois le second événement (Événement 2) après que se soit produit le premier événement (Événement 1) et où la caractéristique prédéterminée est l'intervalle de temps qui sépare le second événement et le second événement qui le précède immédiatement et qui n'a pas été suivi par un premier événement.

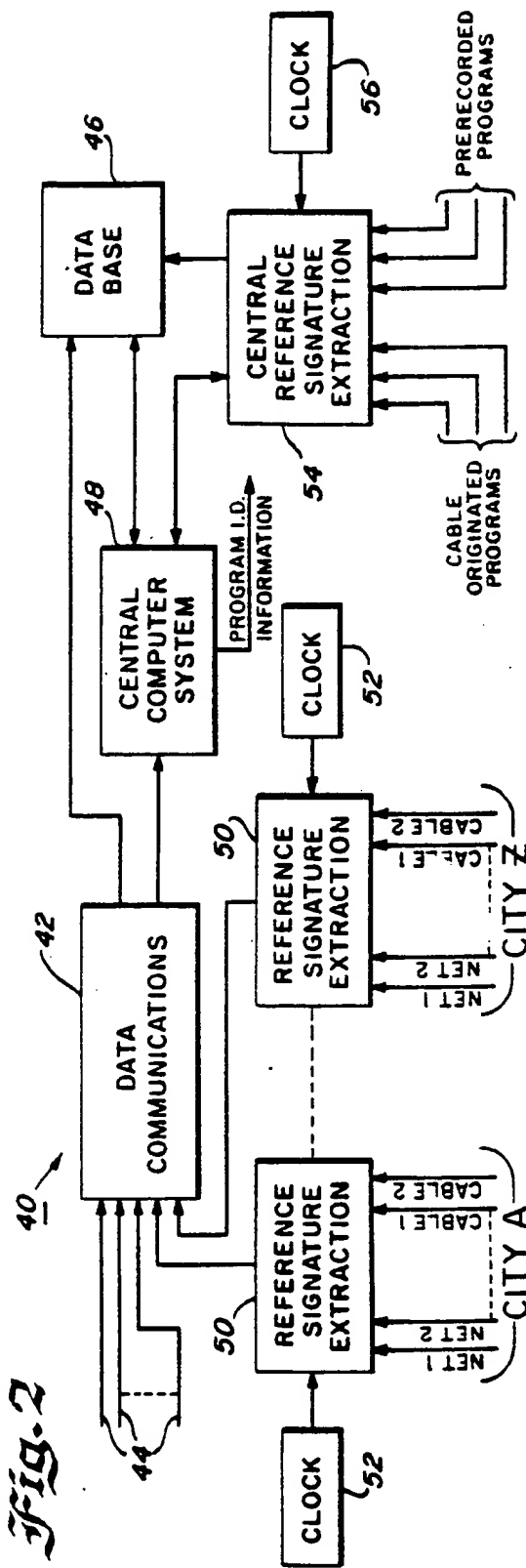
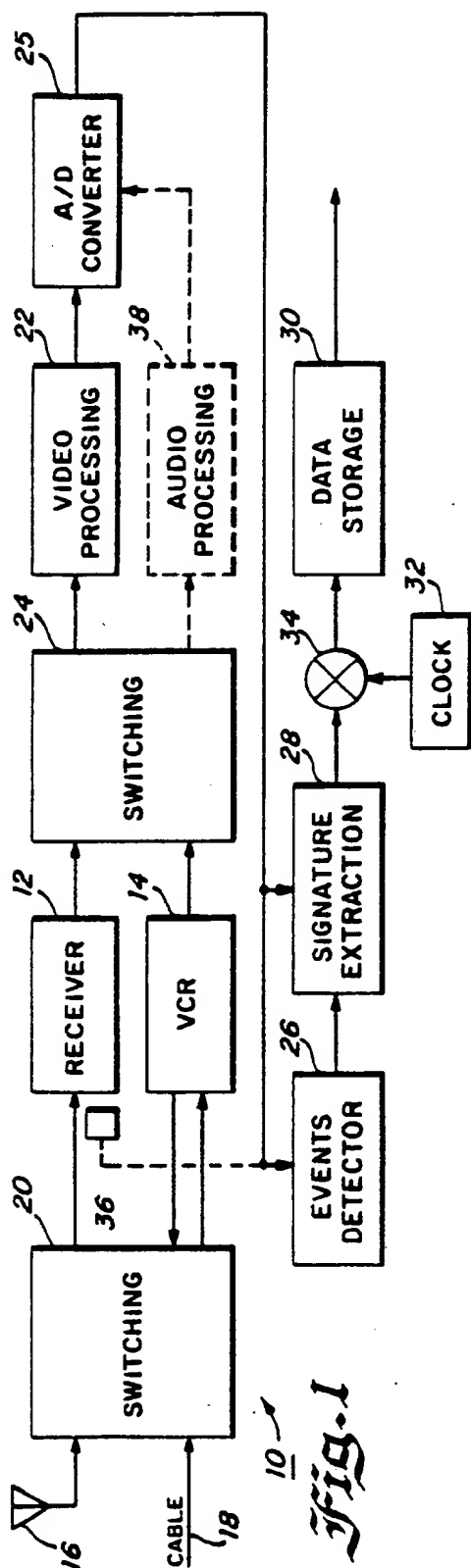


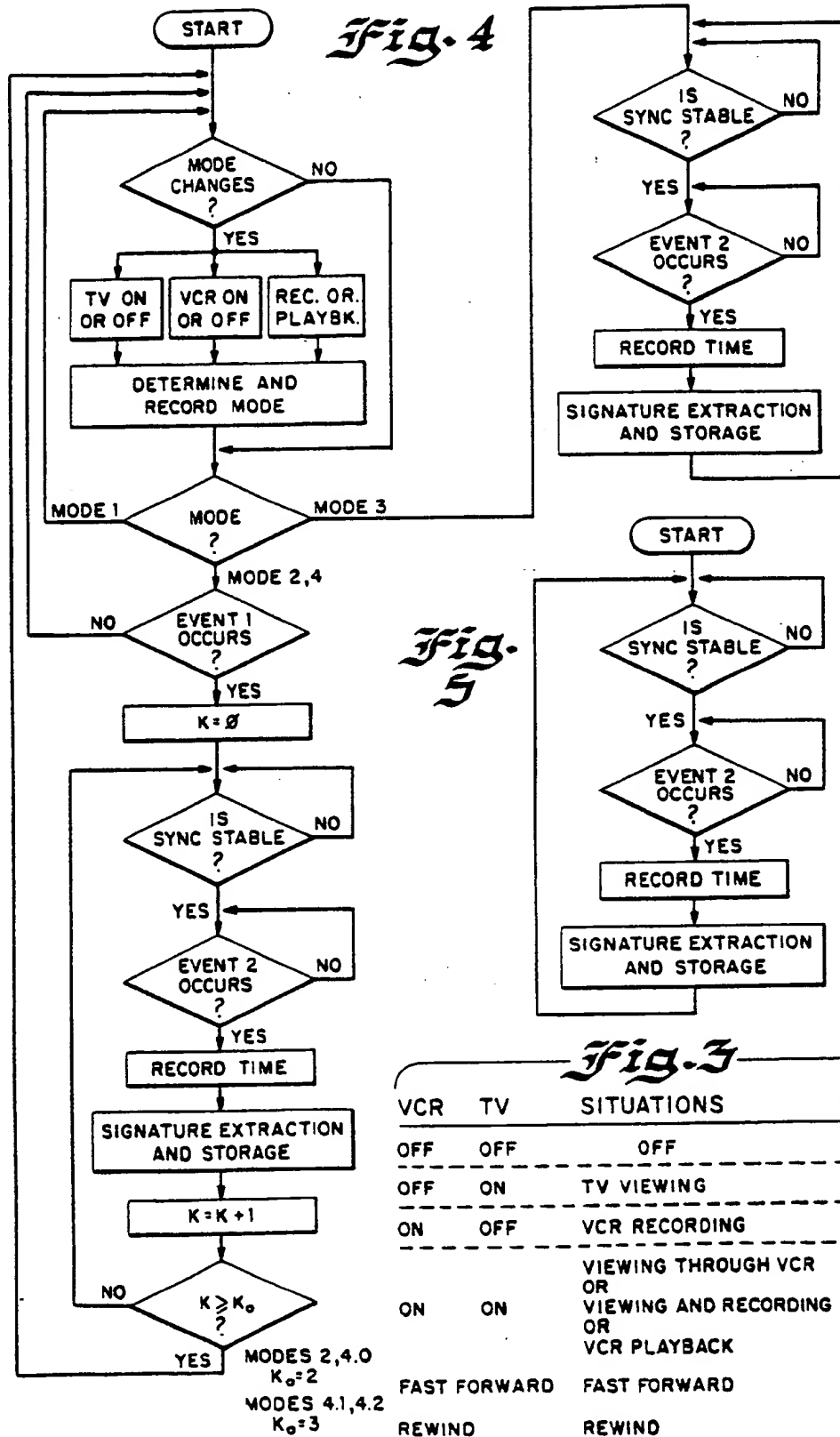
Fig. 4

Fig. 6